

Press Conference with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael G. Mullen, Colombian Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos, and Colombian Military Forces Commander General Freddy Padilla

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ADMIRAL MULLEN: Thank you Minister. Indeed, it is a great privilege to be back in Colombia. First of all while I have done this privately, I certainly want to extend my public congratulations to all the success you have achieved with you and General Padilla, your military and your Government in recent years, particularly the great successes you have enjoyed in the last year. We in the United States, as we have done a long time, continue to strongly support your approach, your execution, and obviously your results. I am grateful for being hosted by General Padilla; grateful for your friendship; I have great respect and admiration for the leadership the team here in Colombia has shown with respect to facing the challenges that are there.

Secondly, Minister you have spoke briefly of this, and that is the regional responsibility that you speak to and the opportunities that are there, the importance of the regional in the mutual challenges, many of those challenges affect the United States as well. The regional leadership is vital in your position, and I think that is one that is very important.

Thirdly, in many ways and most important, the enduring, this is I believe our relationship on the military side is an enduring relationship; it is a strong relationship; it's a critical relationship. Some of the issues that we talked about would go to further that very strong, enduring, critical relationship. I look forward to continuing support, continuing to strengthen that relationship in these great challenges. In fact I believe no one can do it alone, we can only do it with great partners, and you are great partners.

We also talked in my discussions with General Padilla and Minister Santos about the commitment on the part of Colombia to sending Colombian troops to Afghanistan, which is a very positive step, a much needed step in a part of the world that is struggling and that would benefit greatly from your experiences. I think it is very representative of our relationship as well, and strategically a better world for all of us. Again, thank you for your warm welcome, your friendship, your strong support. I look forward to a future which is very bright between us and also amongst is in the region.

QUESTION: (In Spanish)

ADMIRAL MULLEN: I actually leave here and go to Mexico to engage with my counterparts in Mexico. Certainly I am very much aware of challenges that exist there. Although being there and making that visit will give me a much better understanding of those challenges. In the United States, certainly the military side they are very committed to assistance. The specifics of our policies I'll really leave that up to our

Government. The decisions that are associated with this will be made by President Obama with respect to the details, the overall drug policy and those details and the bottom lines of what you talked about. I would not make any lengthy comments about what President Obama... Certainly we are very concerned about weapons, about the entirety of the challenge on the border, the drug problem, the kidnapping, the murders, the weapons, and the fatality of the issue. That is certainly something that our two governments, our two militaries need to work together.

QUESTION: What about U.S. troops to the border?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: I...again I will leave that... that is really a decision for the President to make.

QUESTION: Mr. Defense Minister, Admiral Mullen, General Padilla, good afternoon. A question for Minister Santos: within this Cooperation Agreement, this agreement on bilateral military cooperation with the U.S., what is the Colombian government offering in order for this cooperation to be effective, keeping in mind that the Manta, Ecuador base is to be dismantled, or will no longer function—is it possible that the (Manta) model will be replicated in an area or in different areas of this country?... and for Admiral Mullen...what will your government--your military -- bring to Colombia, to the Defense Ministry in terms of materials and cooperation : aircraft, naval craft, interdiction equipment, intelligence equipment?

MINISTER SANTOS: As I just said, we are in the middle of a negotiation and I don't think it would be prudent to start negotiating through the media. It is all still very basic, basically looking at increasing what we already have and how we can go about it. But when the negotiation is finished, we will call the media to make everything public. I really don't think that at this stage it is good for details to be brought out as this is all part of an ongoing negotiation.

ADMIRAL MULLEN: And I would only add to that the fact the negotiations are taking place and that it is focused on an agreement between the two countries. It represents a broadening and a deepening of the relationship that comes by way of the relationship that has evolved over the last many years which has grown to be very strong and will continue, I am sure, to continue to grow stronger. And just like the minister, I would not publically get into a discussion about the specifics of the negotiations

QUESTION: Admiral, could you tell me how long you think it will take to complete the review that's going on of Guantanamo? And then a question for both the Admiral and the Minister: a lot of U.S. officials have touted Plan Colombia and the successes of Plan Colombia as a model for Pakistan and Afghanistan. How do you see that happening, in what form and what part of Plan Colombia do think could be applied to those two countries?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Well, specifically with respect to the review which President Obama has directed—it's ongoing and I suspect it will be finished here in the very near future and I don't have an exact date. And that review will obviously set, based on his decisions, the strategy and the objectives with respect to that. I think many of us from all over the world can learn from what has happened with respect to the very successful developments of Plan Colombia. As in all plans, there are parts of it that would be very applicable in other parts of the world and specifically to Afghanistan and there would be other parts that would not apply at all.

But the counter-insurgency approach, the providing security for the people, the need for governance upon which the people can depend, not just national governance, but local governance, the ability to create jobs and opportunities for people who feel secure in those jobs are fundamentals that apply here and apply in Afghanistan. I'm actually encouraged based on the briefings that I've received here, since I've been here, about the plans for the future.

So it's important from my perspective never to rest because, clearly, the threat is still there. So while there have been great achievements, there is still much to do. And it has been and I'm sure—I'll let General Padilla speak for himself, but there is great learning which has occurred for all of us—applying that learning to a place like Pakistan and Afghanistan is certainly part of the approach that I take in this review for that strategy.

MINISTER SANTOS: I think that the Admiral said something that is completely true; no one plan cannot be replicated exactly in another country especially when the other country has different conditions. For example here, the problem of the jungles in Colombia and there they have deserts—territories with very different geographies.

However, there are concepts and concrete experiences that can be used in other countries. For example there is the concept we are applying in the Macarena of bringing all aspects of the government, at the same time, in synch --to win the hearts and the support of the people, providing alternatives to the cultivation and trafficking of drugs and, at the same time involving them in the preservation of their own security—of course with the full support of the armed forces and the police.

This is showing really positive results. This concept applied in Afghanistan is something that could really help. And we have particular experiences, like crop eradication, like the integrated fight against trafficking whereby we go after every link in the chain. In Afghanistan there are some jobs that are more important or less important than those that we have here, but the concept is applicable there. It is in this way that we think our

experience could contribute in some way to solving the problem in Afghanistan or the problem in Iraq. General, is there anything you would like to add?

General Padilla: The only thing I'd like to add is something that we discussed this morning with the Admiral, is that this is a process--with respect to Afghanistan—a very responsible process. We are moving step by step. We are taking all of the measures necessary—we are observing; we are deciding on international help, we are examining all of those experiences so that when we take the definitive step to go into Afghanistan, we will make the most responsible decision for the Colombian people.

QUESTION: Good afternoon, Admiral, Minister, General. My question is to Admiral Mullen. We are in a worldwide economic crisis...in this sense, how are you going to support Colombia? How will support (to Colombia) be strengthened with respect to equipment, money or helicopters (inaudible)? What is being done to protect the funding for Plan Colombia?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: I think I have stated in recent weeks about my broad concern for the economic and financial crisis creating instability globally in ways—in some ways that we can predict and in some ways that we can't predict. And that obviously, is tied to governments that don't have the resource base that they had either last year or next year or the year after that.

What I'm encouraged by in my meetings here in Colombia is that the leadership has thought this through very well and looked at the possibilities based on resource allocation and prioritized the plan based on that. And that in that plan, I'm confident, from what I've seen, that the most important parts will continue to be focused on.

And that the leadership is very aware of what the most important parts are—Mr. Santos has talked about some of them today—and then in the future, everybody's aware of the challenges that we have right now with respect to the economy, but the plan for the future here is very well thought through from the military perspective—really broader than that, the whole of government from what I can see-- and the recognition of this challenge of resources is there as well.

So I'm confident that, if the leadership is aware of this based on that, that there will be a good way ahead, even in very difficult times.

QUESTION: Minister, yesterday there was a sort of crisis, some differences in opinion. The Minister of Foreign Affairs came today... what was the response to that on the part of the military high command? What are the terms you came to with the Minister of Foreign Affairs? (inaudible)

MINISTER SANTOS: Those are private conversations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Defense Ministry; I don't think they should be aired in public. We are, as the President's communiqué yesterday stated, unifying criteria, coordinating between the two ministries in order to work together in a more unified and coordinated fashion—at the different levels of both ministries. I think this is a logical step for any government, but particularly at this time, the Ministry of defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be working hand in hand. But I can't discuss the specific terms of the conversations.

Moderator: Thank you all very much for coming, this concludes this press conference.